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SUBJECT: ECOWAS DEFENSE MEETING IN ACCRA: AGREEMENT ON STANDBY FORCE

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¶1. (U) Summary: On September 29-30 the Chiefs of Defense Staff of fourteen ECOWAS countries met in Accra for the tenth Ordinary ECOWAS Defense and Security Commission meeting. Participants pledged a total of 6,500 military personnel to form an ECOWAS standby force. Participants discussed developments in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire. The British government suggested ECOWAS send military observers to Darfur. The Commission directed the official to relay this request through the African Union. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On September 29-30, ECOWAS held its tenth Ordinary Defense and Security Commission Meeting in Accra. Participants included the Chiefs of Defense Staff of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, as well as ECOWAS Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defense and Security Maj. General C.O. Ciarras, Force Commander of the UN Mission in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) Maj. General Abdoulaye Fall, Force Commander of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) Maj. General Sajjad Akram, and the Deputy Force Commander of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Maj. General Owonibi. Chaired by Ghanaian Chief of Defense Staff Lt. General Seth Kofi Obeng, the Commission discussed the situations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire. They collectively pledged 6,500 military personnel to create an ECOWAS standby force, with the following configuration:

BENIN

3 x Infantry Company
1 x Company Gendarmerie
1 x Armored Squadron

BURKINA FASO

1 x Infantry Company (150 men)
3 x Infantry Companies (1 x Infantry Battalion)
1 x Motorized Squadron
1 x Artillery Battery
1 x Company Gendarmerie (120 all ranks)

GAMBIA

1 x Infantry Company (Self-sustained)
2 x Sections Military Police
1 x Platoon (36 personnel)

GHANA

1 x Engineer Company
1 x Level II Hospital
1 x Helicopter squadron of 4 helicopters

GUINEA

1 x Infantry Battalion (2-3 combat teams)
1 x Support Logistics Group
1 x Armored Unit

GUINEA BISSAU

1 x Composite Battalion (650 personnel)) Breakdown to be given later.

MALI

1 x Infantry Company (150)
1 x Reconnaissance Squadron
1 x Engineer Unit (Company)
1 x Military Police Unit (Company)
1 x National Guard (150 men)

NIGER

2 x Infantry Companies
1 x Gendarmerie Platoon

NIGERIA

1 x Motorized Battalion
1 x Reconnaissance Company
1 x Engineer Squadron
1 x Signal Squadron
1 x Level II Hospital
1 x Fast Patrol Boat
1 x Landing Ship
1 x C-130 Hercules Transport Aircraft
1 x Artillery battery

SENEGAL

1 x Infantry battalion (of 500)
1 x Engineer Company (of 150)
1 x Medical level II Hospital
1 x Military Police/ Gendarmerie Company (of 100)
1 x Artillery Battery

SIERRA LEONE

1 x Infantry Company

TOGO

2 x Infantry Companies (To be confirmed)
Gendarmerie - Half Company (To be confirmed)

13. (U) Other Highlights from the draft meeting report included:

-- The ECOWAS Secretariat would intensify efforts to secure the remaining 267 million USD pledged by the international community to bolster the Government of Liberia in its reconstruction and development efforts.

-- The Secretariat would encourage the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to "make the necessary reforms to give effect to the provisions" of the Accra III Accord. The Secretariat also would encourage the New Forces "to show flexibility and goodwill in the requirement for disarmament as per the Accord".

--The Commission commended UNOCI for its assurances on contingency plans to handle any reversal of the current level of security in Cote d'Ivoire. The ECOWAS Authority agreed to engage UNHQ regarding the outstanding aviation unit required by UNOCI.

--A good public relations plan was to be developed by UNOCI, in conjunction with the Cote D'Ivoire Government and the New Forces, to enhance confidence building in the AO.

--The ECOWAS Secretariat would take up the problems encountered by Liberian refugees at the Cote d'Ivoire border at Danane with the Heads of State and Government.

-- With regard to the DDRR program in Liberia, the projection on the ex-combatants to be disarmed and reintegrated would be based on a figure of 100,000.

--The ECOWAS Authority would be requested to employ its good offices to resolve the leadership crisis within the LURD faction in Liberia to avoid any conflicts that might derail the peace process.

--The British Government proposed that ECOWAS send military observers to Darfur, Sudan. The Commission asked the British Government to route this request through the African Union.

--The ECOWAS authority would be requested to encourage the Government of Sierra Leone to continue its efforts to implement the DDRR program, schemes to resolve youth unemployment, and actions aimed at resolving the dispute at Yenga.

Comment

14. (SBU) Participants in the meeting saw this meeting as particularly productive and cooperative. The attendance level of Defense Chiefs was excellent. They agreed on pledges for the standby force on the first day of the meeting. In his closing remarks, General Obeng stressed the need for ECOWAS to have a positive influence in seeking peace in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. Given the goodwill expressed at this meeting, Obeng saw the possibility of an "over-subscribed" standby-force. Funding and logistics for this force will be taken up at the November 22-23 donors conference in Abuja. The British official acknowledged to poloff that it was appropriate for protocol reasons that the request for forces to Darfur be routed via the AU. A representative from Mali approached him privately about contributing to a Darfur force. Dr. Charles Grimm, US Advisor for Defense and Security Affairs to ECOWAS, told

Emboffs he was delighted with the outcome and atmospherics of the meeting, although he thought it unlikely ECOWAS would offer troops to Darfur, given the lack of available officer staff in member countries. We will forward a copy of the final meeting report to desk as soon as possible.

LANIER